

## “Redistricting in Michigan: Should Politicians Choose Their Voters?”

Thank you—for having me!

I’m here representing the League of Women Voters. We are a non-partisan organization that encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government. The League does not support or oppose parties or candidates. You might be familiar with our efforts to educate voters through our non-partisan Voter Guides and Candidate Forums.

The League also works to increase understanding of major public policy issues through education. That’s why I am here today. To provide information about redistricting: how we do it in Michigan, how the current process is unfair to voters and how citizens could change it.

First of all, what is redistricting and why is it a problem in Michigan?

Redistricting is the process of drawing the lines for congressional and legislative districts. How the district lines are drawn determines which voters reside in each congressional and legislative district. In Michigan, we have 14 U.S. Congressional districts, 38 Michigan Senate districts and 110 Michigan House districts.

The lines for each of these districts must be re-drawn every 10 years following the national census. Since Michigan has been losing population, the number of U.S. Congressional districts we are entitled to has been decreasing.

Federal Law requires that an equal number of persons live in each district. You probably remember the “one person, one vote” requirement established by the U.S. Supreme Court.

While the law states how many people must live in each district, it doesn’t specify how the lines are to be drawn or where, except that minority rights must be protected.

Michigan Laws authorize the Legislature to draw the lines for U.S. Congress and the Michigan House and Senate. It gives the Governor the power to veto the district maps that result. The Michigan Supreme Court has the final authority over the district maps.

But historically when MI revised and adopted the 1963 Constitution it included an 8 member commission—4 Democrats and 4 Republicans. I think we might have been the 1<sup>st</sup> state with a bipartisan commission. We tried it 3 times (over 30 years) it didn’t work and the MI Supreme Court broke the tie. That section was ruled unconstitutional when other parts were litigated in the courts.

Now why is that a problem?

If you look at your handout, at the chart in the middle, you can see that in 1991, the Democrats held the majority of seats in the Texas Legislature and therefore they controlled how the lines were drawn to produce the maps.

The result was that even though the total number of votes in the state for U.S. Congress was split pretty evenly: 49% for the Republicans and 49% for the Democrats, the Republicans ended up with only 9 seats and the Democrats with 21.

On the other hand, in 2012 in Michigan when the Republicans were in the majority and controlled how the lines were drawn to produce the maps, the result was just the opposite. 46% of the total vote in the state for U.S. Congress voted Republican, the other 51% voted Democratic. Yet, the Republicans ended up with 9 seats and the Democrats with 5.

The problem is, whichever party is in power, it draws the lines in a way that benefits the party, not the voters. The politicians are drawing the maps in a way that keeps them and their party in power.

Politicians are choosing their voters. It should be the other way around.

When politicians draw the maps, voters are not represented fairly. A disproportionate number of Democrats or Republicans are elected, depending on which party was in power when the maps were drawn.

Additionally—these maps cause gridlock. According to Inside MI Politics—85 % of the seats are determined in the primary—meaning a Republican or a Democrat is sure to win in specific seats.

Given that the current way we draw the maps in Michigan is unfair to voters, what can be done?

The lines don't have to be drawn by the state Legislature. Only 26 other states give their legislatures the authority to draw the maps. Seventeen states have advisory commissions. Seven states have independent redistricting commissions. Those six states are Alaska, Arizona, California, Idaho, Montana, Ohio and Washington.

Let's look at how the process works in two of those states: Arizona and California.

First, Arizona.

In 2000, Arizona voters approved an amendment to their constitution that established a Citizens' Independent Redistricting Commission. It consisted of two Republicans, two Democrats and a Chairperson who could not be a member of either party.

Later, the Arizona Legislature sued the Commission, contending the amendment violated a provision of the U.S. Constitution that requires legislatures to establish congressional district lines.

On June 29, 2015, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that **citizens** had the right to decide how congressional lines are drawn and that Arizona's Independent Redistricting Commission **is constitutional**.

How about California?

In 2008, California voters approved Proposition 11, authorizing the establishment of a 14 member independent redistricting commission. The commission consists of five Democrats, five Republicans and four members who cannot be from either major party.

Studies of the independent process in California show that the process has increased voter turnout, and electoral accountability. Partisan bias has decreased.

Changing how redistricting is done in Michigan, would require amending the Michigan Constitution. There are two ways to do that in Michigan. One, the Legislature could put it on the ballot. This would require a majority vote of the Legislature and the support of the Governor. Or, the citizens could put it on the ballot by means of an initiative petition. Such a petition drive would require over 400,000 signatures.

The League of Women Voters has been educating voters for almost a hundred years. It is an important part of our mission. The League believes that Michigan's redistricting process is unfair to voters. Citizens need to know this and that it's possible to change the process.

Our goal is to ensure that every vote counts, that our elections represent the will of the people and that our government is of, by and for the people.

"The League of Women Voters supports an Independent Commission as a solution to the problems with Michigan's current redistricting process. LWVMI is aware that other groups are thinking about a ballot proposal campaign. At this time, the League has not endorsed a ballot proposal or joined a coalition to do so. The LWVMI Board will evaluate the possibility of joining a ballot campaign based on the proposal and the probability of the campaign's success." ([www.lwvmi.org](http://www.lwvmi.org))

I would be happy to take questions.